

The Elder William Brewster's Homestead  
and  
the Brewster lilacs

It seems a pity that the chronicles of the early Duxbury settlers were so neglected. Among those who landed in the Mayflower were <sup>three</sup> ~~two~~ men of education, <sup>well</sup> ~~eminently~~ qualified to write. William Bradford and William Brewster *and Edward Winslow.*

One can not be thankful enough for what Bradford ~~AM~~ wrote and that after many years his History of the Plymouth Plantation was found in the possession of the Bishop of London and through the efforts of certain public spirited men was restored to the State of Massachusetts. But we would like a more detailed account of Brewster's every day life after he built his house at the Nook near his great friend Myles Standish who survived him by thirteen years. The view from the Brewster homestead site, while not as extensive or beautiful as that from where Standish built, is fair enough, overlooking the eminence on which later there was to be a monument to the doughty Captain. From this hill on clear days can be seen Provincetown where the Pilgrims first landed after their tempestuous voyage across the Atlantic from Southampton.

Edward Winslow, a young Englishman of talent and education, was also competent to write and in fact did write accounts of the early days after the landing of the Mayflower in 1620.

William Brewster himself was educated at Oxford and after the Pilgrim band settled in Leyden taught the youth of that city English through the medium of the Latin tongue. He also wrote an English grammar and subsequently established himself as a printer and published theological books which could not be safely published in England.

For this he became a fugitive from justice and strange to say sought safety in London, the capital of the country trying to cause his *arrest*. There in the vast city he remained in obscurity until the sailing of the Mayflower.

Perhaps one should not be too critical of these early settlers for not writing more. Life was extremely serious with them and often they were engaged in a life and death struggle for mere existence. Under such circumstances it was not to be wondered at that little except what was absolutely necessary was written.

It must be remembered that Elder Brewster was practically the minister in the infant Colony during the first nine years of its existence or till ~~the~~ a minister was procured. As presiding Elder he preached twice each Sunday and unless he repeated his sermons, he must be credited with <sup>a</sup> considerable literary <sup>output</sup> ~~work~~. After the minister for the Colony was secured, Brewster felt free to follow his old friend Hyles Standish and build a house on the Hook at Duxbury not far from the latter. At the time of this removal Brewster was sixty-four years old and that he should assume at this age the obligations of clearing his *large farm* reveals the courage of the man. For his acreage was considerable, extending from the homestead site across the low marshy land to what is now Standish Street almost up to where the path began leading to the grist mill at Millbrook, or according to the old records, "we also allowe a way through Sprague and Bassets Orchard to goe to Duxhorough Towne".

Elder Brewster was far from being a strong man, evidently of a different muscular ~~the~~ build from his friend Hyles Standish. Yet it is recorded that he never shirked work of any kind. In that first terrible winter when only seven of the Pilgrim band remained well enough to care for the sick who were prostrated from exposure and lack of food, Brewster was one of the seven who according to

Bradford "tended the sick with the utmost faithfulness and kindness and yet the Lord so upheld these persons that they were not at all infected".

One can not help wishing that a portrait of Brewster was extant. Of the four leading Pilgrims, Bradford, Brewster, Standish and Winslow only the latter had had a portrait painted and that in England. It can readily be imagined that a portrait painter would have fared badly at his profession at the time the above mentioned pioneers were struggling for mere existence. And photography was in the distant future. While this explains the absence of likenesses it doesn't do away with the regret that they did not exist.

From 1630 to 1637 when Ralph Partridge was secured as minister for the First Church at Duxbury, Brewster repeated what he had done at Plymouth and acted as minister to the infant Church in the capacity of Presiding Elder. Bradford in his tribute to Brewster at the latter's death, <sup>said</sup> "He was wise and discreet and well spoken, having a grave but deliberate utterance; of a cheerful spirit, very sociable and pleasant, of a humble and modest mind, of a peaceful disposition, undervaluing himself and his own abilities and some times overvaluing others; inoffensive and innocent in life and conversation. None did more offend or displease him than such as would haughtily and proudly carry and lift up themselves, being risen from nothing and having little else in them to commend them but a few fine clothes or a little riches more than others. In teaching he was very moving and stirring of affections, also very plain and distinct. He had a singular good gift in prayer, in ripping up the heart and conscience before God. He always thought it were better for ministers to pray oftener and divide their prayers, than be long and tedious in the same, except upon solemn and special occasions, as in days of humiliation and the like".

Although it has been impossible to prove or disprove the truth of the tradition, the legend is quite wide spread in Duxbury that the original slip of the lilacs on the Brewster homestead site was brought over on the Mayflower by the Elder from Holland. If it be true that a lilac slip was brought over in 1620 by the Elder, is it not more likely that it was brought from England than Holland for the Elder had been living in the former country some months before he joined the Mayflower? But why more as to where the lilacs came from or who brought them? There they are on the original Brewster homestead site, mute testimonials to the fact that the Elder cared for such things at a time when beauty, as such, was somewhat neglected in a severe struggle for existence. And there they bloom bravely year after year uncared for but flourishing, as much as to say to the present generation of Duxbury dwellers that they may have almost forgotten this grand old man who lived there but his old friends the lilacs have not.

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